

citizen professionalism

work
Holt
re
knowledge
public

land grant tradition

historical analysis

democratic

Deliberative democracy

Workers

Lessons

Schools of Philosophy for Extension

Promise and Peril of Knowing Together

Farmer Discussion Groups

co-creating knowledge

academics
citizens
society

The Promise & Peril of Knowing Together

Lessons from Farmer Discussion Groups and Schools of Philosophy for Extension Workers, 1934-1946

Timothy J. Shaffer
IARSLCE Conference 2012

“We have to go back to our very narrow focus.... We have to go back to the basics...”

- County Extension Director

Land Grant & Cooperative Extension Systems

Land Grant System

- Public higher education institutions established in 1862 with the passage of the Morrill Act (e.g. Michigan State University, Penn State University, University of Maryland, etc.)

Smith-Lever Act 1914 created nationwide system of Cooperative Extension (based on earlier models at colleges and universities)

- Partnership between USDA, land grant college/university, local community (county or region)
- Non-formal education
- ✓ Experts providing research-based technical knowledge to solve problems

Cooperative Extension Slogans

- “Experts for life.”
- “Your trusted local source of learning for life.”
- “Experts on tap.”
- “...puts university knowledge into the hands of people.”

Dominant Narratives

Positivist Tradition / Professionalization (Brint 1994, Sullivan 2005)

- Application of scientific methods to social problems
- Social problems can be understood as technical problems

Public Service Tradition (Peters 2010)

- Unbiased, disinterested neutrality
- Strict separation of scholars' identities and roles as scientists from their identities as citizens
- Provision of scientific knowledge, technical expertise, and assistance without trying to persuade
- Fundamental distinction between expert and “ordinary” citizens

(One) Counter Narrative

Public Work (Boyte 2004; Boyte & Nari 1996)

- Citizens co-create a democratic way of life through public, political work
- Citizens negotiate and work to solve problems
- Experts and “ordinary” citizens contribute their own forms of knowledge and expertise to address public problems

United States Department of Agriculture

The New Deal USDA

- Agricultural Adjustment Administration
- Rural Electrification Administration
- Soil Conservation Service

The USDA's democratic role

- Broadening how people understood agricultural issues
- Looking beyond economics and raised questions about democratic processes and outcomes
- Learning from and with citizens

Program Study & Discussion

Discussion Groups

- Topical issues of importance addressed within small groups in communities
- For farmers and other rural people
- USDA produced materials to aid discussion

Schools of Philosophy

- Four-day programs including lectures and discussions about philosophical, cultural, economic, historical influences on agriculture
- Initially for Cooperative Extension professionals; later expanded to include other leaders within communities

Discussion in North Carolina

“We have organized what we hope is a permanent discussion group in our county.... I don’t think there is anything the government could do that would benefit more people than to finance a group in at least each county in the U.S. I think this work could be done more successfully through our Land Grant Colleges!”

- J. S. Melvin, Parkersburg, North Carolina, May 31, 1935

Now Available < < < <

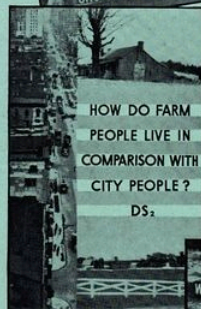
Discussion Series 1936-37

Illustrated pamphlets of sixteen pages each, presenting pros and cons on the following eight questions:

- What Should be the Farmers' Share in the National Income? (DS-1)
- How Do Farm People Live in Comparison With City People? (DS-2)
- Should Farm Ownership be a Goal of Agricultural Policy? (DS-3)
- Exports and Imports—How Do They Affect the Farmer? (DS-4)
- Is Increased Efficiency in Farming Always a Good Thing? (DS-5)
- What Should Farmers Aim to Accomplish Through Organization? (DS-6)
- What Kind of Agricultural Policy is Necessary to Save Our Soil? (DS-7)
- What Part Should Farmers in Your County Take in Making National Agricultural Policy? (DS-8)

Also available are revised reprints of two pamphlets on technique:

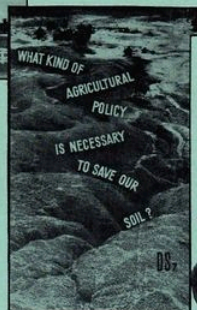
- Discussion: A Brief Guide to Methods. (D-1)
- How to Organize and Conduct County Forums. (D-2)



Copies of the publications on both subject matter and technique are being supplied to county extension agents through State extension divisions. Additional copies are obtainable free on application to the State extension director or to the

EXTENSION SERVICE

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D. C.



results in Michigan is the copper sulphate-nicotine-sulphate treatment, which is generally used by sheepmen throughout the state. Directions for the same can be secured from your county agricultural agent's office or

at birth, had fewer losses thereafter, the pigs made faster gains, and required less feed per pound of gain. Furthermore, crossbred females made better brood sows than purebreds, their litters were larger, and the

standardbred Reds or the bred White Leghorns. The average of about 190 eggs again, let me remind you, parent stock in the cross is important.

The same applies generally to successful hybrids in corn, and so forth—pure parent stock of outstanding individual character should be used.

Electric Fence Case

THE first test case by the court to determine the danger of the use of 110-volt on electric farm fences along a public highway was commenced in Flint, on Nov. 17, by turning a verdict in favor of the defendant.

A little 3½-year-old girl, an energized wire on the farm of Theodore and Mrs. just outside the city limits. Among the witnesses who for the state were a state inspector, the electrical inspector of the city of Flint, and Prof. Ebinger, head of the rural extension department of M. S. U. after 30 minutes of testimony rendered an unanimous verdict in favor of the defendants.

2 Lambs in 7½ Months

I HAVE a 2-year-old Shropshire ewe that produced a ram lamb April 6, 1937, and raised, Nov. 23, 1937, another ewe lamb, which she had in 7½ months she had two lambs. This is rather unusual, says W. Eckhardt, Livingston

Promote Group Discussion

THE Michigan State College extension service, on Jan. 1, 1936, added to its program the project of group discussion, and put a state discussion group leader in charge. As this project must be carried on under what is known as the local leader plan, the first year was devoted to discovering and training men and women in the art of leading "properly conducted and purposeful discussion" among groups of rural people.

The result has been that during the past year 244 groups in 34 counties, held 480 discussions on 72 different topics, with an attendance of 12,043 people, 5,931 of whom participated, according to written reports filed with the county agricultural agents and state leader.

The variety of topics and problems discussed is striking. Most of the groups are connected with some existing organization, such as, local Granges, Farm Bureau locals, Farm Union locals, parent-teacher associations, leaders in 4-H club work, and home demonstration work, various church groups, vocational agricultural classes, etc. Among the 72 different topics the following might be cited, as constituting a fair average:

Agricultural Conservation Program; The Discussion Method in

Adult Education; Our Children and Our Schools; Social Security; What Should Farmers Expect from Their Organizations; Farmers Interest in the Labor Situation; The Repeal of Prohibition; What Was the Chief Cause of the Farm Depression; The Supreme Court Issue; The Sit-Down Strike; Farm Ownership; The Canadian Trade Agreement; The Family Size Farm; Farm Bureau Seeds; Co-operation; The Farmer and the Turf; Shall We Make Christmas Presents of Military Games; Gardens; Rural Mail; Exports and Imports—How Do They Affect the Farmer; What is the Biggest Thing in Life; What Can We Do to Control Sheep Losses by Coyotes; Insurance; Co-operative Buying; What Kind of Policy is Necessary to Save Our Soils; Strikes and Beer Gardens; Maintaining Good Tourist Business; Rural Electrification.

These group discussions have afforded many interesting programs. It is all pretty new yet, but as skill is acquired by both leaders and group members, promises to be one of the most interesting and valuable methods in adult education yet devised.

People interested in group discussion should contact their county agricultural agent, or Wm. F. Johnston, State Discussion Group Leader, 213 N. LaGrave St., Paw Paw, Mich.

AUGLAIZE Co.



Farm and Home Hour
NBC Network
Stations WLW - WJR - WTAM
Tuesday, February 26, 1935
12:30 to 1:30

To Community Leaders:

Would it be worthwhile for rural folk to gather in community groups at regular intervals to discuss economic and social problems affecting farming, home making, rural and community life?

Do you know that there are several such groups meeting in various Ohio communities?

Do you believe such a movement should be fostered in our county?

Just to start you thinking about this we hope you will tune in next Tuesday, February 26th on the Farm and Home Hour at 12:30 o'clock and listen to Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace discuss this subject.

Let us know sometime what you think of the idea.

Sincerely yours,

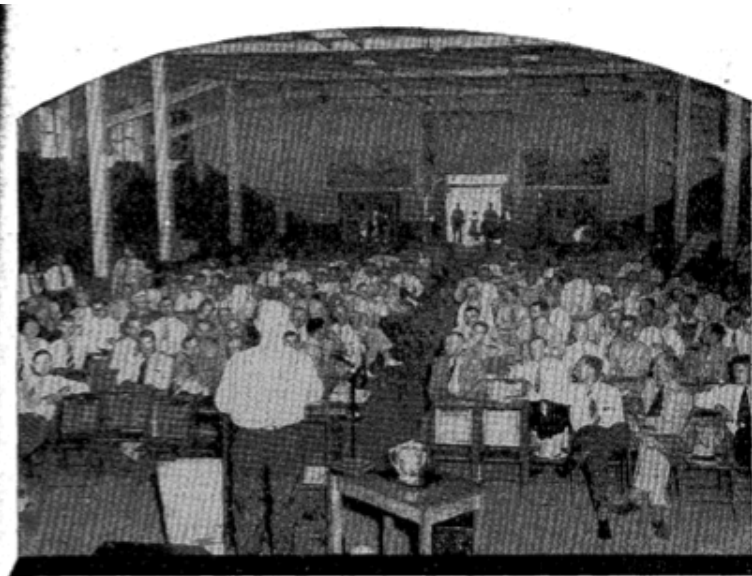
Norma Aschbacher
Home Demonstration Agent

Clarence D. Brown
County Agricultural Agent.

875 copies sent.
Auglaize.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of Ohio, The Ohio State University, United States Department of Agriculture, Auglaize County Commissioners Cooperating Extension Service, County Agent, Home Demonstration Work 2/21/35





Schools of Philosophy for Farmers

by CARL F. TAEUSCH ¹

A MAJOR characteristic of American life and thought at the present time is a search for truly democratic methods in running our affairs. We are acutely conscious of the problem because we so strongly wish to avoid laying a trap for ourselves—the trap whose jaws are dictatorship. Here is an account of a significant democratic development in rural life—the growth of discussion groups in rural communities and of State-wide conferences, called “schools of philosophy,” from one end of the country to the other. Farmers and their wives, farmer committeemen, and agricultural administrators all attend these “schools.” Discussion is wide and free, and it covers the most fundamental problems affecting American life today. Both sides of controversial questions are attacked and defended vigorously. The general feeling among those who have attended these discussions is that they are not only stimulating and educational in the highest sense but that they are at the same time a democratic safety valve and a training ground in democratic methods.

THE FARMER is a natural-born philosopher. Not only does he have to be a philosopher to live through the many things farmers have to face, including the weather and economic depressions, but his work is of such a varied character that he has a better opportunity to “see life whole” than does the more specialized man in the city.

¹ Carl F. Taeusch is Head, Division of Program Study and Discussion, Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

Push Back from Extension Agents

“County agents who were responsible for setting up the discussion groups in communities and counties were not always enthusiastic about this additional project advocated by the Department of Agriculture at a time when they were already burdened with numerous federal programs. The training and experience of the agents did not fit them with the necessary tolerance and objectivity for this task; for **they were accustomed to parceling out a continuous supply of "right answers" to immediately pressing farm problems and consequently often found it difficult to see the practical value of philosophical discussion groups**” (Baker 1939, p. 85).

“...I have always believed that no single specialist or expert, nor any single body of scientific knowledge, can ever deal adequately with even a relatively small and apparently detached agricultural problem. I believe that when, for instance, we have a farm problem that seems on the surface to be wholly an economic matter, we may safely take it for granted that the economic problem is interwoven with factors that are political, sociological, psychological, philosophical, and even religious. And we should realize that any solution or policy that is decided upon is bound to have effects upon human life and conduct that none but philosophy and religion openly profess to judge. Economic wisdom alone, therefore, is not enough for proper consideration of agricultural problems that by common consent are defined as economic problems. We cannot escape getting involved in questions of moral, philosophical, and spiritual values whenever we touch upon any social problem” (Wilson 1939, p. 218).

Goals and Impact

- Discussion Groups and Schools were opportunities to reflectively think about, discuss, and act on public problems.
- Programs designed to raise and engage questions about democratic life and the role of citizens and experts within a healthy democracy. There weren't answers "in the back of the book."
- 3 million rural people participated in discussion groups
- USDA produced more the 50 pamphlets and distributed millions of copies
- Trained tens of thousands in discussion method
- 122 Schools in which over 50,000 leaders participated

1939 or 2012?

- Complex and wicked problems
- Dominant narrative that focuses on technical dimensions of issues limiting approaches that acknowledge ethical, moral, and/or political questions
- Marginalization of citizens and types of knowledge that are not quantifiable

What We Might Apply Today

- Deliberative and democratic processes
- Include and embrace “ordinary” citizens and experts as co-creators of (diverse types of) knowledge
- Understand complex issues in broader context(s)

Citations

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Thank you

Questions or comments?

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